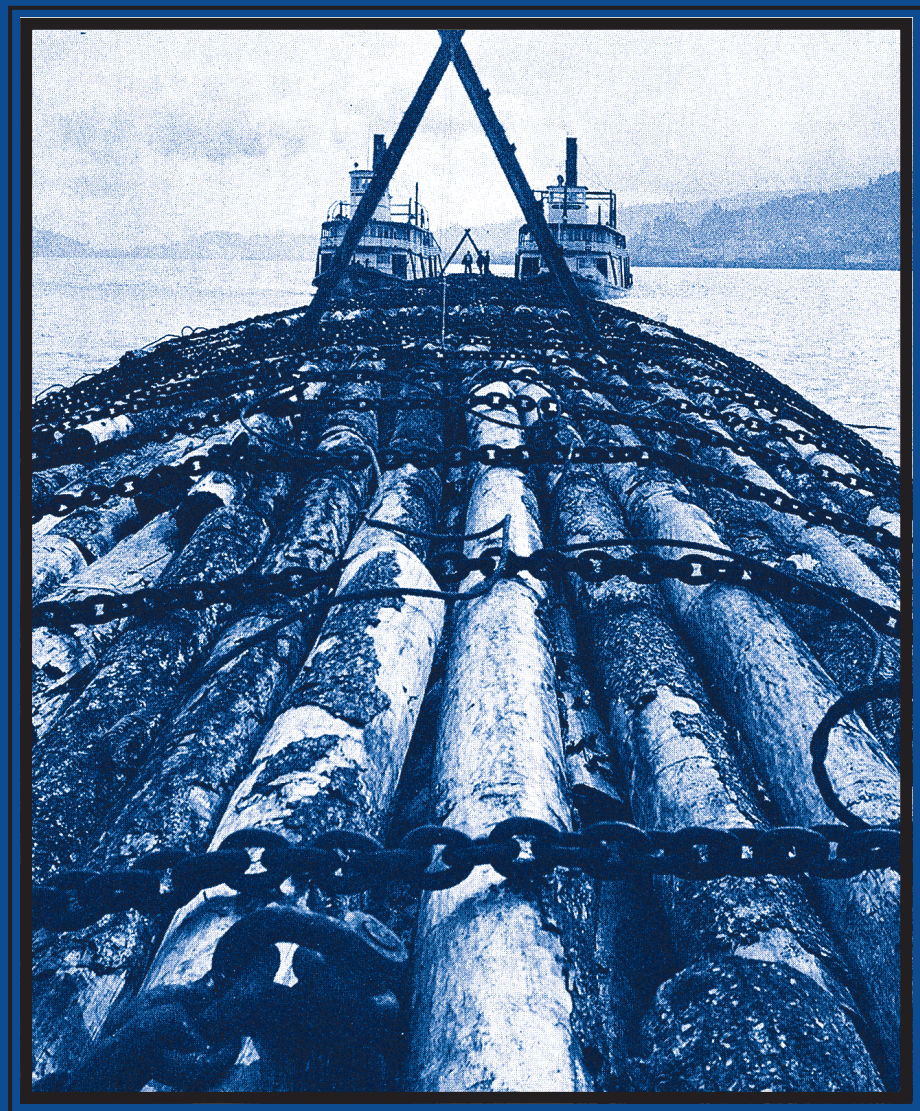
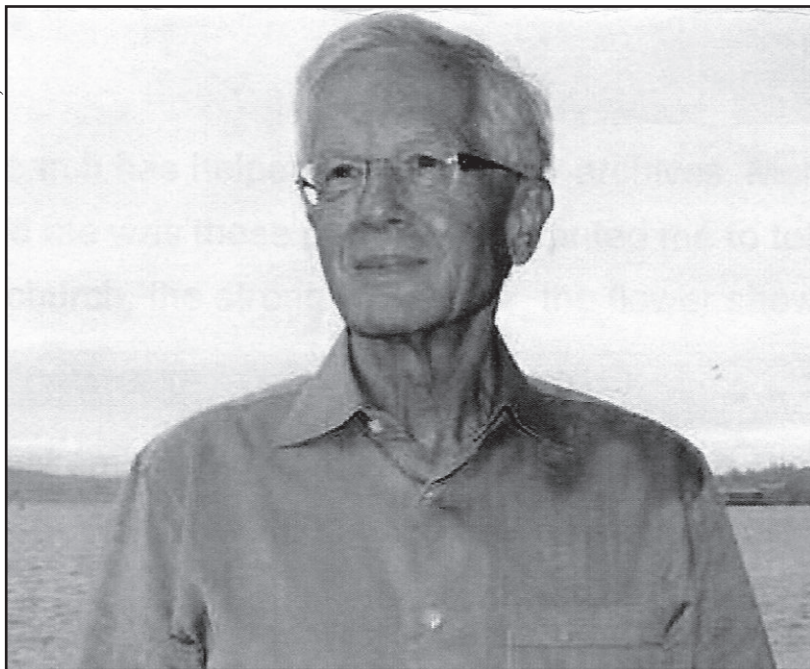


CLATSOP COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

CUMTUX



VOL. 40, No. 4 — FALL 2020



JIM AALBERG

In This Issue . . .

An introduction by Jim Aalburg, author of “Floating Forests” in this issue:

While researching my book *The Company Towns of Clatsop County*, I became acquainted with Eric Evenson, a fourth-generation logger, residing in Clatskanie. Eric shared with me his extensive family archives and photographs, dating back to the late 1890s. A portion of these archives related to his great-grandfather’s construction of massive log rafts. Much has been written previously about these rafts. But, nothing focused on the economic and financial facts behind the scene. To me, it is a story that personifies ingenuity, creativity, brilliant engineering, risk-taking, and drive that is behind the advantages we enjoy today. I have always had an affinity for our area’s history, particularly regarding logging and sawmilling, businesses my great great grandfather, John West, engaged in at Westport. See his story in the Winter 2005 issue of Cumtux.

Editor’s Note: This issue also includes a story about Uniontown that Roy Schulback presented in 1994 at the Mission Mill Museum in Salem.

—The Editor

CLATSOP COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
714 Exchange St.
P.O. Box 88
Astoria, Oregon 97103-0088
(503) 325-2203
cchs@cumtux.org
www.cumtux.org

Heritage Museum
16th and Exchange St., Astoria

Flavel House Museum
8th and Duane St., Astoria

Oregon Film Museum
7th and Duane St., Astoria

Uppertown Firefighters Museum
30th and Marine Drive, Astoria

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Luke Colvin, Astoria, OR
President

David Reid, Astoria, OR
Vice-President

Kent Easom, Coeur d'Alene, ID
Secretary

Kent Ivanoff, Astoria, OR
Treasurer

Jim Aalberg, Warrenton, OR
Andrew Bornstein, Bellingham, WA
Brett Estes, Astoria, OR
Craig Hoppes, Astoria, OR
Julie Kovatch, Astoria, OR
Patricia Roberts, Gearhart, OR
Randy Stemper, Astoria, OR
Dulcye Taylor, Astoria, OR

STAFF

McAndrew Burns
Executive Director

Sam Rascoe
Director of Marketing

Liisa Penner
Archivist & Cumtux Editor

Chelsea Vaughn
Curator

Emily Rivera
Business Manager

Matt Powers
Facilities Manager

Carol Lambert
Sheila Nolan
Susan Swanby
Michael Wentworth
Cumtux Support

CUMTUX

CLATSOP COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

QUARTERLY

VOL. 40, No. 4—FALL 2020

Copyright © 2020 Clatsop County Historical Society
(ISSN 1083-9216)

Contents:

**1 Floating Forests: The Story of
Oregon's Ocean-Going
Log Rafts**
By Jim Aalberg

41 Uniontown
By Roy Schulbach

FRONT COVER:

CIRCA 1920. TWO STERNWHEELERS PUSHING A RAFT DOWNRIVER TOWARDS THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA. THE RAFT'S DIMENSIONS ARE: WIDTH FIFTY-FIVE FEET; MAXIMUM DEPTH THIRTY-FIVE FEET; LENGTH 960 FEET; DRAUGHT TWENTY-SIX TO TWENTY-EIGHT FEET. OVER 1,000 FEET OF TWO-INCH WIDE CHAINS WEIGHING 270 TONS ENCIRCLED THE RAFT EIGHTY TIMES. WHEN THE RAFTS WERE BROKEN UP IN THE MILL POND AT THE BENSON LUMBER COMPANY SAWMILL AT SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, THESE CHAINS WERE SHIPPED BACK ON STEAMSHIPS. ONE OF THE STEAMSHIPS USED WAS THE FRANK LYNCH OWNED BY FRANK LYNCH OWNER OF THE BENSON LUMBER CO.
IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.

CUMTUX: Chinook jargon:
"To know...to inform"

FLOATING FORESTS: THE STORY OF OREGON'S OCEAN-GOING LOG RAFTS

By Jim Aalberg

A special thank you to Eric M. Evenson of the Evenson Logging Company of Clatskanie, Oregon, for making the Evenson family historical records and photographs available so this important and fascinating logging and sawmilling story can be told. The Evenson logging and sawmilling dynasty now spans five generations on the lower Columbia through sustainable logging practices that continue to this day. I also wish to thank both Deb Brown, a great-granddaughter of O. J. Evenson, for her input and insight in telling this story and Ryan Hume, freelance writer and editor, for his excellent work on the article.

BEGINNING IN 1906, over the next thirty-five years, the Simon Benson Log Rafts would push over one billion feet of Oregon timber down the volatile Columbia River, into the unforgiving Pacific Ocean, then south to the San Diego Bay.

The first raft was completed in the winter of 1905-1906 and arrived in San Diego harbor on September 7, 1906. These leviathan-sized transports were also known as "cigar rafts," due to their resem-

blance to Perfecto cigars. Most of the rafts were assembled on the southern end of Wallace Island on Wallace Slough, a few miles upriver from Westport. Rafts were also assembled at a site near Cathlamet, Washington.

In the years that followed, there were typically two or three rafts sent down south during July, August, and September, for a total of 120 rafts. These rafts reached 1,000 feet in length, fifty-two feet in width, and had an average draft of twenty-eight feet, with the surface of the raft being seventeen feet above sea level. These rafts contained as much as six million feet of timber bound together with chains that weighed 270 tons. The last behemoth set sail in the autumn of 1941. Like the ones before it, the raft was towed at an average speed of two to three knots per hour, for what would be the final fifteen-day voyage of the 1,150-mile trip, ending an era and an ambitious and extremely profitable enterprise.

And, though Simon Benson germinated the idea and retained the namesake, it was the ingenuity and skill of three other men

that kept this endeavor afloat: O.J. Evenson, J.A. Fastabend, and William Frank Lynch. In understanding the story of the “Benson Cigar Log Rafts,” it is important to realize that by 1911 Benson had liquidated all his timber and lumbering holdings. However, the Benson brand, with its inherent goodwill value, was retained by the new owner/operators.

CONCEPTION OF THE ENTERPRISE

While taking a leisurely winter stay at the very fashionable Hotel Del Coronado in 1904, Benson noted a possible opportunity in the burgeoning seaside town of San Diego, California. To meet the needs of Southern California’s massive growth spurt, lumber was shipped primarily on lumber schooners and by rail, the latter being unprofitable. Happening to own over 45,000 acres of prime timberland on the lower Columbia, Benson saw a vast untapped potential here.

However, since he could not control freight rates, how to run ton after ton of timber over a thousand rugged miles and still turn a profit is one thing Benson mulled over? Steamship operators and maritime unions would curse Benson’s proposed rafting venture, as it put no income in their pockets.

Upon returning to Clatskanie, Benson discussed and developed his wild premise with his trusted

business partner, O.J. Evenson, a highly skilled and innovative millwright. To turn this dream into a reality, they engaged the brilliant engineering talents of J.A. Fastabend of Astoria. In 1909, the sound marketing and financial acumen of San Diego investor Frank Lynch was added to the mix and what once sounded like an impossible idea, became not only possible, but immensely profitable. Before this, in early 1906, Benson purchased sixteen acres of water frontage on the San Diego Bay to build his sawmill. The San Diego mill was completed and commenced cutting lumber on May 22, 1907. The first raft left Wallace Slough on August 23, 1906, for Astoria. The tugboat *Dauntless* towed the raft away from Astoria on August 2, arriving at San Diego on September 7, 1906.

The logs transported by these massive rafts would be cut into over 600 million board feet of lumber once they arrived at the new mill in “America’s Finest City,” San Diego’s not-so-humble nickname for itself. Imagine that each single, 1,000-foot-long raft supplied enough lumber to construct 600 five-room frame houses in sunny Southern California.

This article tells the incredible story of building and transporting these floating forests. It is accompanied by rare and striking photos, plus the specific details behind these log rafts that would supply

the Northwest lumber that built the Imperial Valley of Southern California. One must question the overall economics of such an audacious venture. Why not simply produce the lumber at any one of the massive existing sawmills on the lower Columbia? Why not ship finished lumber or even partially cut cants to be re-sawn in San Diego? Why invest in the building of a new mill over one thousand miles to the south? Furthermore, how did such an improbable enterprise become such a resounding commercial success?

SIMON BENSON

Simon Berger Iverson (later changing his name to Benson) was born in Norway in 1851 and became a “giant” in the Northwest timber industry throughout the 1880-1890s. His story is well known to many, due in part to the book *Simon Benson: Northwest Lumber King*, written by his eldest daughter, Alice.

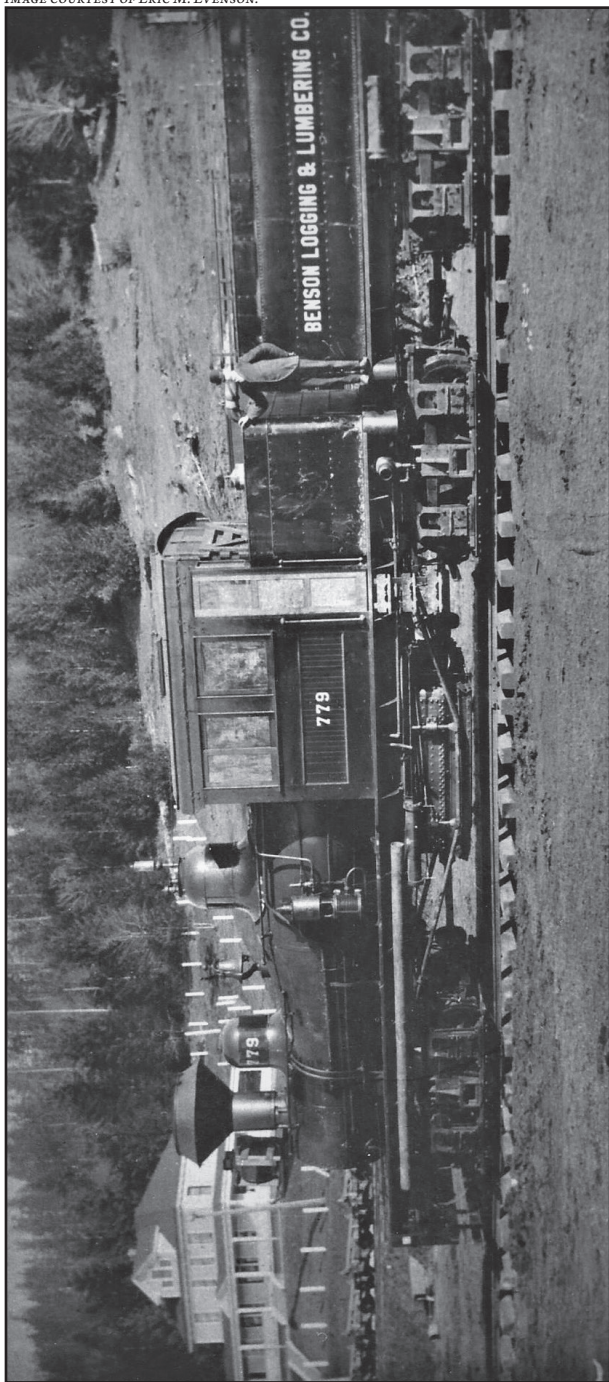
He first formed the Benson Logging & Lumbering Company in 1895 as an Oregon Corporation with headquarters in Clatskanie, Oregon. When this company dissolved, the majority of its assets would make up the Benson Timber Co., which filed its articles of incorporation in Oregon on June 11, 1911. Five years earlier, the Benson Lumber Co. was incorporated on July 17, 1906, under the laws

of the State of Oregon, with the principal place of business being the City of Portland. The officers and owners of this entity were S. Benson, President, A. S. Benson, Vice President, and O.J. Evenson, Manager. It was capitalized at \$50,000 with assets comprised of the San Diego sawmill and the ocean rafting operations at Wallace Slough, Oregon. Besides the newly constructed mill, the entity also held all the other California assets, which included a planing mill, sash and door factory, and a wharf that jutted 450 feet into the bay. Benson indicated that the original cost of the San Diego mill was roughly \$400,000, and he had recouped it from operating profits in less than four years.

The dynamic corporate/ownership structures of the Benson Timber Co. and the affiliated Benson Lumber Co. are, at times, challenging to follow. However, clear synopsis of these entities is laid out in *The Reports of the U.S. Board of Tax Appeals Vol. 9 of the 9th Circuit*. This report documents a judicial tax valuation appeal by Benson of Oregon tax assessors' values of his timberlands at the time he sold them to Frank Lynch and his investment partners. The dispute was ultimately settled to Benson's satisfaction.

On December 31, 1910, Simon Benson entered a sales contract with his son Amos S.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



CIRCA 1900. TODAY'S N. NEHALEM AND 5TH STREETS, CLATSKANIE, OREGON. AMOS S. BENSON BORN 1877, DIED 1944. SON OF SIMON BENSON AND HEIR-APPARENT TO HIS FATHER'S TIMBER EMPIRE. AMOS' NEWLY CONSTRUCTED HOME IN THE BACKGROUND STILL STANDS TODAY. O. J. EVENSON ACQUIRED THE HOME IN CIRCA 1912 AND RESIDED THERE UNTIL HIS DEATH THEN HIS SON, WILLARD EVENSON, AND FAMILY OWNED THE HOME. THIS BALDWIN LOCOMOTIVE WAS ONE OF SIX LOCOMOTIVES OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE BENSON LOGGING & LUMBERING COMPANY WHICH WAS INCORPORATED IN OREGON IN 1895.

Benson and O. J. Evenson for forty percent interest of Benson Logging & Lumbering Company for \$1,200,000 to be paid, without interest, from the operations of the timber property. However, this sale was never consummated as Amos, the heir apparent to the Benson timber empire, was in failing health at the time. Amos was born in 1877 and died of a heart attack at age sixty-six at his Los Angeles residence. It is interesting to note that Simon Benson stated in a 1913 affidavit in the tax appeal hearing mentioned previously that both he and his son were in poor health and unable to perform the duties of operating Benson Logging and Lumbering Company. Benson had already sold 26,000 acres of his timberlands in Columbia County, referred to as the south track of the Benson Timber Co. holdings, to Fir Tree Lumber Co. for two million dollars.

Benson had been operating his newly constructed sawmill in San Diego for a little over five years when he sold it to Frank Lynch in 1911. Lynch paid Benson \$50,000 in cash and executed a \$350,000 collateralized promissory note, which Lynch repaid in full within thirty-six months from mill profits.

While Benson stayed at the Paradise Valley Sanitarium (owned and operated by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which advertised: “easy access to San Diego, and yet away from the bustle and dust

of the city. An ideal resort for those needing rest and recuperation. Employing the same methods, as to diet, exercise, and treatment as the famous Battle Creek Sanitarium”), located in National City just south of San Diego, he met again with Frank Lynch. He gave him a thirty-day option to purchase the Benson Timber Co. of Clatskanie, Oregon. This opportunity included timber property and equipment for an asking price of \$2,100,000, roughly \$56 million in 2020 dollars. The purchase price represented both the plant and equipment worth \$455,000, and 16,810 acres of timberland, of which 1,700 acres had been cut-over. The timber included a 250-acre tract of timber adjacent to the Benson sawmill located on the Westport Slough in Clatskanie. A cruise of the timberland estimated a potential yield of one billion feet. The plant and equipment value is represented by the sawmill with a 500,000 board-foot-cut daily capacity and a fully equipped logging railroad, twelve miles long, which included six locomotives, eighteen donkey engines, and 100 train logging trucks. The sale included Benson’s Clatskanie & Nehalem Railroad Co. However, Benson shrewdly held the stock in the railroad to be released only when the Lynch \$1.6 million note and mortgage was paid in full, which it eventually was. The operating headquarters and sawmill

were located at Clatskanie with a large wharf stamped onto Beaver Slough.

On June 13, 1911, Lynch told *The Morning Oregonian* that there would be no change in the organization (the Benson Timber Company of Clatskanie, Oregon) company's force and that operations would continue along the plans inaugurated by Benson. Lynch conveyed, in that same interview, that the new companies (Benson Lumber Company and Benson Timber Company) have been organized to retain the name and goodwill of Mr. Benson.

Lynch secured Louis B. Hanna, the 11th governor of the state of North Dakota, and a lifelong friend from Casselton, North Dakota, as one of his major investment partners and hired O.J. Evenson as the key operating partner and a minority owner. Having exercised the option for purchase on June 5, 1911, Lynch paid Benson \$100,000 in cash (roughly \$2.7 million in current 2020 dollars), executed a personal note signed by both himself and his wife Georgia for \$350,000, and a note and mortgage for the balance of the purchase price of \$1,600,000. As a condition of the sale, Benson required that ownership be extended to O. J. Evenson, and took Evenson's personal note for \$50,000 (approximately \$1.3 million in 2020 dollars), and 500 shares were issued, giving Evenson

9.81% ownership in the Benson Timber Company. In addition to the purchase, the sale to Lynch also included all the logs then in Beaver Slough for \$6,000. Lynch and Associates held 88.23% ownership, and Portland attorney E.E. Coover, 1.96%.

Elmer Ellsworth Coover Esq. was a personal legal and financial advisor to Benson for many years. Coover was appointed corporate vice president with a seat on the board. He was also the original secretary/treasurer of the Benson Lumbering Company. Benson orchestrated these ownership and management positions in the Benson Timber Co. for both Evenson and Coover, who were long-term trusted partners. After all, Benson was holding notes from Lynch for over 2 million dollars, which was to be paid back from company operations, and Benson certainly wanted Lynch to be successful. Evenson was clearly key to the success of both the operations of Benson Timber Company and Benson Lumber Company. Benson's name remained on "the door" at both companies.

Benson had been considering retirement for some time, and now at age fifty-eight, he had liquidated his timber and sawmilling empire, realizing in excess of \$100,000,000 in 2020 dollars. He told *The Oregonian* newspaper that he would sink the bulk of these funds into Portland

real estate and dedicate himself to philanthropy. He also made substantial real estate investments in Southern California. What he started, however, continued under Lynch, Evenson, and the other investors.

On April 25, 1913, Benson Timber Co., now controlled by Lynch, gave an option to Millard D. Olds, a substantial timber and railroad financier from Cheboygan, Michigan, to purchase the company for \$2,500,000. Pending in Congress at the time was a bill that imposed restrictions on the rafting of timber on the ocean, and Lynch feared its passage would make their enterprise impracticable and unprofitable. The option was never exercised and was not renewed. Later, Olds came back with a much higher offer, but Lynch declined.

O. J. EVENSON

Born in St. Croix County, Wisconsin, on March 17, 1868, Ole Johann "O.J." Evenson would follow in his father's footsteps to become a trained millwright. One of ten children, his parents William Trekel Evenson and Esther Lythson, both emigrated from Norway to settle in Wisconsin where the elder Evenson built and operated sawmills, giving O.J. an education in the trade at a young age.

He set out on his own in 1890, arriving in Tacoma, Washington,

where he found work as a millwright and met his future wife, Malvina Govertson. They would go on to have four sons—Willard, Franklin, Clarence, and Justin—forging a legacy that continues to influence Oregon's timber industry to this day.

Just one year after landing in Tacoma, Evenson brought his new bride back home to Wisconsin, though their return to the Midwest would be short-lived. Following opportunity, Evenson was pulled back to the Pacific Northwest in 1900, partnering with O.A. Ritan to rebuild and expand the shuttered Portland Lumber Company sawmill, which had closed some years before, in 1893. Evenson was the General Manager of the rebuilt mill which was now one of the largest and most modern sawmills in the area. Evenson was also secretary and purchasing agent (log buyer) for the revived company.

It was during this time Simon Benson consulted with Evenson regarding log rafts. Evenson envisioned the concept of the moored floating cradle with removable sides that would sink as it was loaded and the herringbone rib system of chains that would allow these huge rafts some flexibility, thus reducing the battering from the waves that could break up the rafts. Both men were of Norwegian descent, and Benson had also spent some time residing in Wisconsin.



OLE JOHANN EVENSON
B. MAR. 17, 1868, ST. CROIX COUNTY, WISCONSIN,
D. NOV. 7, 1938, CLATSKANIE, OR

Perhaps because of these bonds, as well as Evenson's reputation as one the most capable millwrights in the Northwest, Benson retained Evenson to design, supervise construction, and manage his new sawmill in San Diego. Evenson

was a minority owner and officer of the Benson Lumber Co. which owned the San Diego sawmill, plus logging and raft building operations in Oregon. He would also assist in the design and implementation of the massive log rafts that were fed

into the Pacific to supply the mill in the south.

Evenson managed the completed Benson Lumber Company sawmill in Southern California until 1911, when Benson beckoned him back to Oregon to take charge of the newly formed Benson Timber Co. of Clatskanie, now under the ownership of William Franklin Lynch. Evenson had one condition: he wanted to become a stockholder in the burgeoning enterprise. Benson agreed and took Evenson's personal note in exchange for 500 shares.

By 1929, Lynch had assumed ownership of both of Benson's companies, and Evenson returned to San Diego to resume active management of the Benson Lumber Company sawmill operations there. He simultaneously continued to oversee operations in Clatskanie until he retired in 1936. He died on November 7, 1938, in Clatskanie, but his influence would continue to reverberate through Oregon timber for years to come.

J. A. FASTABEND

John Antone Fastabend was born in Padberg, Westphalia, Prussia (now Germany), on June 28, 1853. With his family, he immigrated to the United States in 1869, first settling in Pennsylvania before going west to Missouri. In 1881, he took a job as a construction foreman, building railroad bridges in Colorado. In 1892, he was hired

to build a railroad line from Astoria to Portland via Hillsboro. The company went bankrupt in 1893, and the line was never completed, but the unfinished job did land Fastabend in the Northwest.

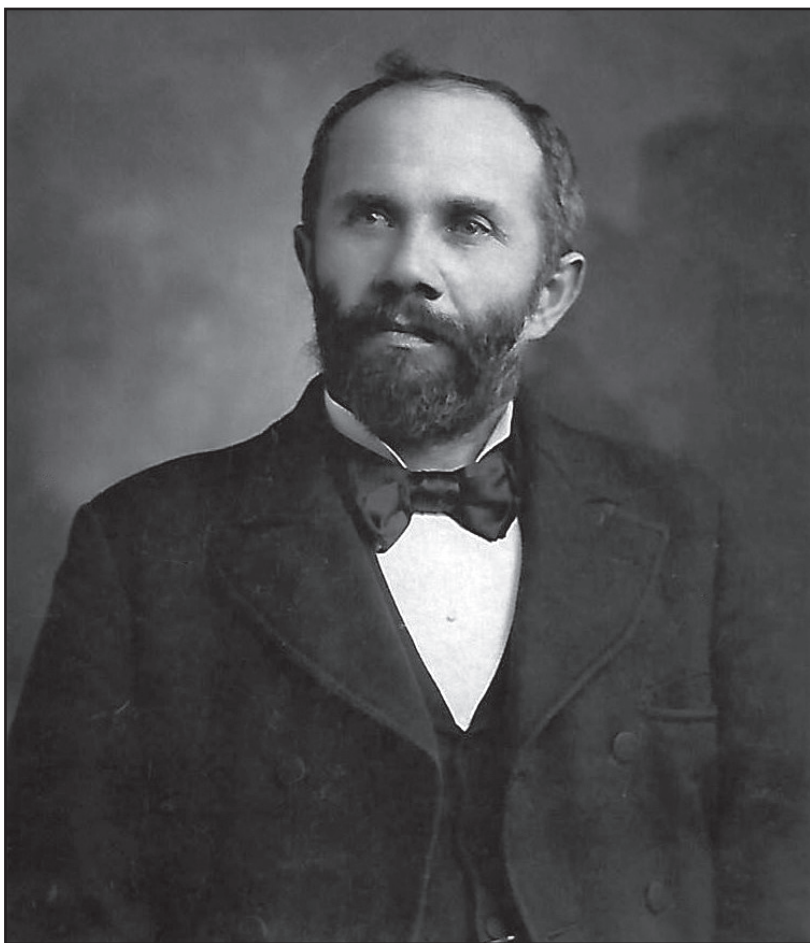
In the mid-1890s, he went to work for the Robertson Rafting Co. (owned by Captain Hugh Roderick Robertson) designing, constructing, and engineering ocean-going lografts at the company's facilities at Stella, Washington. The Robertson Rafts were comprised of 110,000 feet of logs, about half the size of the Benson rafts. With this experience, he was hired by Benson and Evenson to build the Benson Cigar Log Rafts.

Fastabend was a legendary construction engineer, and some of his other projects included the Destruction Island Lighthouse, the Desdemona Sand Lighthouse, Tongue Point Buoy Station, the Yamhill River Locks, multiple buildings at Fort Stevens, as well as the Elmore Canneries at Astoria, Rooster Rock, and Garibaldi.

Captain Robertson had taken out several patents on his raft and cradle construction designs in 1886-1888. The Benson type rafts were also patented, and there were likely some patent negotiations between Benson and Captain Robertson.

FRANK LYNCH

William Franklin Lynch, the successful businessman and finan-



JOHN ANTONE FASTABEND.

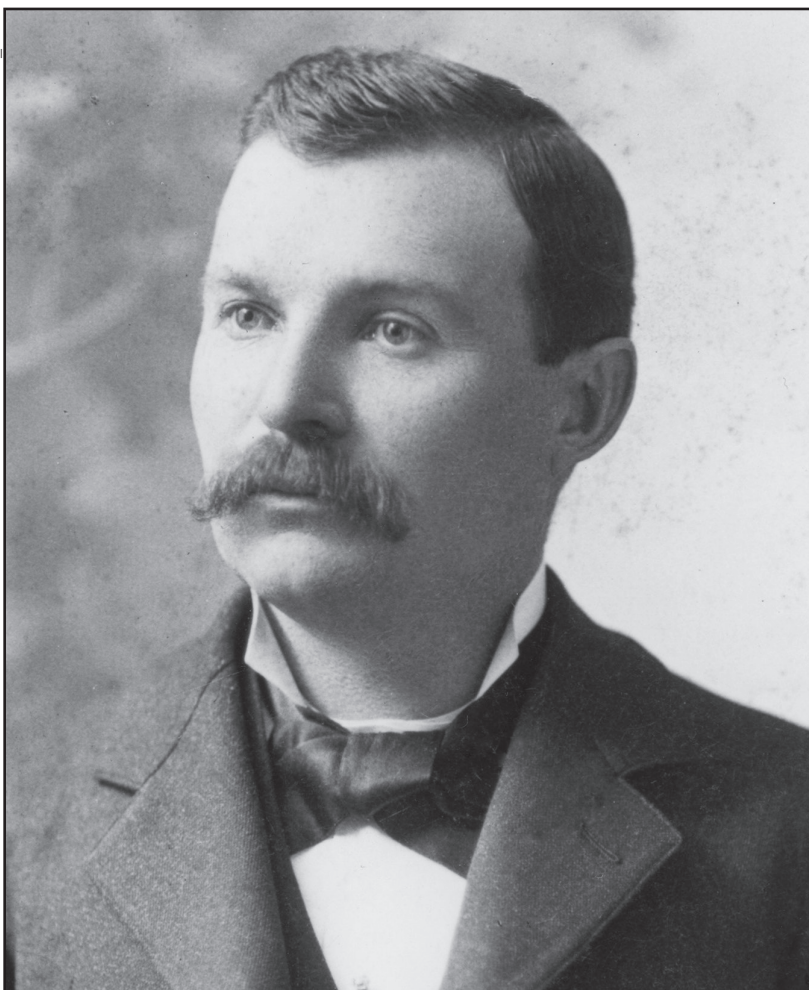
B. PADBERG, PRUSSIA, JUNE 28, 1853, D. NOVEMBER 4, 1942.

cier who went by Frank, was born in Coshocton, Ohio, on December 19, 1853. When he died on April 22, 1939, in his home at 1925 K Street in San Diego, California, at age eighty-five, after an illustrious career, his obituary ran on the front page of the *San Diego Union* newspaper.

Fortune and renown were never certain for Lynch, and early in his life, this Midwestern boy could

never have dreamed of what would take him all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Reared and educated in Wisconsin and Minnesota, he had only a general school education and was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

He started modestly with a farming implement business in Plainview, Minnesota. After marrying Georgia Allen, the couple



WILLIAM FRANKLIN LYNCH. BORN IN COSHOCTON, OHIO, DECEMBER 19, 1853. HE
DIED IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, ON APRIL 22, 1939.

relocated to Casselton, North Dakota, just east of Fargo, where he opened a similar shop again. After landing in Casselton, Lynch used the capital accrued through his farm supply business to expand into real estate development and lending, thereby changing his fortunes and destiny forever.

Eventually, he came to own over 25,000 acres in Cass County, North Dakota, and platted the towns of Lynchburg and Chaffee, with each town named to honor one man—Lynch, obviously, as well as his partner, H. T. Chaffee. With Chaffee, Lynch helped to organize the Red River Valley and Western

IMAGE COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER IMAGE #OP 10486

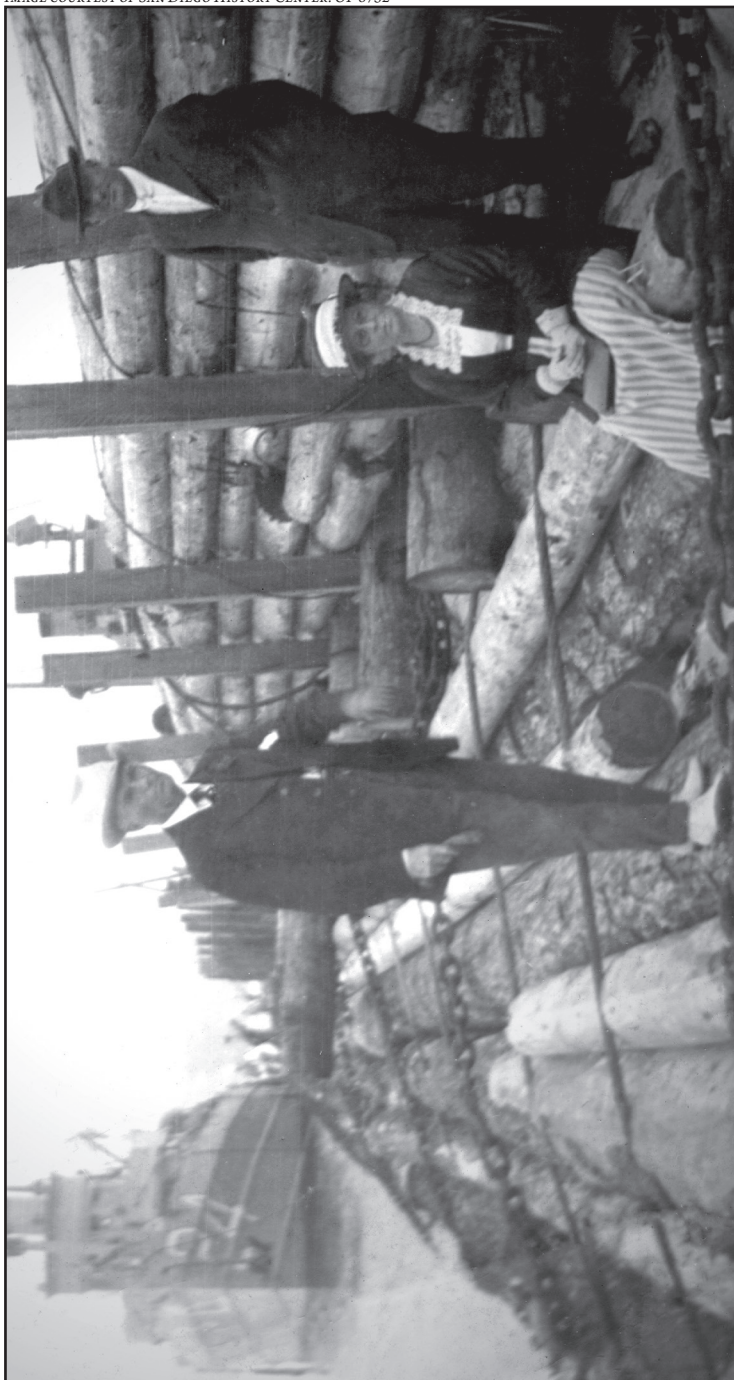


FRANK AND GEORGIA LYNCH STANDING IN FRONT OF THEIR HOME ON 20TH AND K STREET IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA. THE HOME WAS NAMED "VILLA MONTEZUMA" AND WAS BUILT FOR JESS SHEPARD, A WORLD-RENOWNED FRENCH PIANIST, AUTHOR, AND SPIRITUALIST, IN 1887 FOR \$19,000, PLUS AN ADDITIONAL \$7,000 FOR THE STAINED-GLASS WINDOW. LYNCH BOUGHT THE HOME IN 1909 AND RESIDED THERE UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1939. HE WOULD WATCH OVER HIS SAWMILL LOCATED 20 BLOCKS AWAY ON THE SAN DIEGO BAY FROM THE HOME'S NORTH TOWER. TODAY THE HOME IS OWNED BY THE CITY AND OPERATED AS A MUSEUM. CA. 1909.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



CIRCA 1940. BENSON LUMBER COMPANY SAWMILL LOCATED AT THE FOOT OF SIGSBEE STREET ON SAN DIEGO BAY, CALIFORNIA. THE SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER OCCUPIES THE SITE TODAY. THE MASSIVE TIMBERS WERE USED FOR TUNA AND MINE SWEEPER BOAT KEELS. THE SAWMILL OPENED IN 1906 AND CLOSED IN 1946.



CIRCA 1910. FRANK LYNCH AND HIS WIFE GEORGIA AND O.J. EVENSON (MAN ON RIGHT) POSING ON A LOG RAFT WITH A "DECK LOAD" MOORED AT THE BENSON LUMBER COMPANY PIER IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA.

Railroad, of which he became president. The pair later sold the line to Great Northern for a large profit.

Lynch bought the Occidental Hotel in Casselton and developed several of the town's business blocks. In 1897, he expanded his farming implement, real estate, and loan businesses to include operations in Fargo.

But Lynch saw there was still more opportunity left for him on the horizon. In 1909, at the age of fifty-six, Lynch embarked on a new business venture that would take him far from his successes in North Dakota. He purchased the Benson Lumber Co. for \$400,000 (a sum worth roughly \$12 million in 2020), and he and Georgia uprooted their lives, heading for sunny San Diego.

His investments in Benson's enterprise would help grow the booming city's skyline into what it is today. Eventually, he would assume ownership of all of Benson's timber and lumbering ventures and keep the rafts running as Benson and O. J. Evenson had envisioned.

Besides gaining a reputation as a consummate businessman and investor, Lynch was also a devout Methodist and philanthropist. Even after moving to California, he was a trustee of the Methodist-affiliated Wesley College in Grand Forks, North Dakota, and received an honorary law doctorate from the college in 1930. Lynch also chaired the board of trustees of the First

Methodist Church of San Diego and was a significant benefactor of the San Diego Zoo, which opened in 1916 and is considered one of the most prestigious zoos in the world.

While the Lynches never had any children, they certainly left their mark on the world at every place they settled.

PERFECTO:

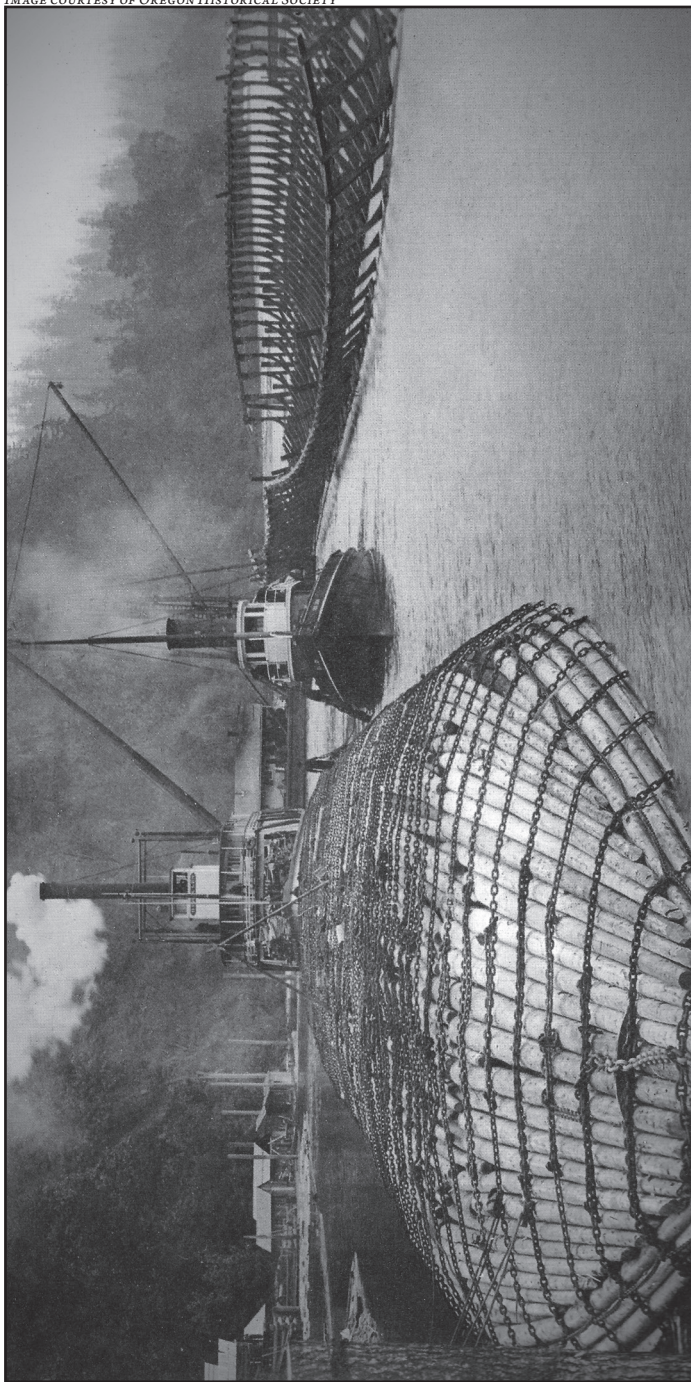
THE BENSON CIGAR RAFTS

The story behind Simon Benson's wild endeavor is well documented, if not commonly known. Willard T. Evenson, the eldest son of O. J. Evenson, wrote a detailed history of the operation in 1939 titled "Ocean Log Rafts," which was published in the *Cathlamet Eagle*. Oberlin Evenson, Willard's son, offered his father's written account to *The Merchant Magazine*, where it was republished in their July 1981 issue. Oberlin also wrote his own five-page history in 1962.

Before that, Edvard Evenson, also a son of Willard Evenson, had already produced the definitive account of the rafting operation. In a term paper submitted to an accounting and finance class while he was a student at Golden Gate College in downtown San Francisco in 1941, he described the entire operation in intimate detail.

Excerpts from his term paper follow:

A raft of logs that could withstand the pounding of the open seas had



CIRCA 1895. THE ROBERTSON RAFTING COMPANY LOG RAFT BUILDING OPERATION AT COAL CREEK SLOUGH, STELLA, WASHINGTON, OWNED BY CAPTAIN HUGH RODERICK ROBERTSON OF ST. JOHN NEW BRUNSWICK. HE PARTNERED WITH BOTH THE PORT BLAKELY MILL COMPANY AND THE A.B. HAMMOND LUMBER COMPANY AND BUILT OCEAN-GOING RAFTS BOUND FOR SAN FRANCISCO. THIS RAFT ASSEMBLY CRADLE AND OPERATION WAS ENGINEERED, CONSTRUCTED, AND SUPERVISED BY J. A. FASTABEND.

always been a lumberjack dream. The first effort to make this dream a reality was made by Dr. James Tupper of Dresden, Maine, in 1791 when he made an unsuccessful attempt to take logs to England.

The first ocean-going log raft was conceived and built by Captain H. R. Robertson of St. Johns, New Brunswick. This raft was built in the late '80s in a land cradle and contained about 110,000 lineal feet of piling, destined for Boston. This raft, although small compared with the Benson raft constructed near Cathlamet, Washington, was so heavy that a tedious and troublesome time was experienced in launching it. A storm in the North Atlantic broke up the raft soon after it put to sea, and it was a total loss.

The next venture planned to overcome the difficulty of launching from the shore. The cradle was somewhat enlarged so that it could be moored in the water and deep enough to sink as the building of the raft progressed and remain afloat when the raft was finished, which drew about fifteen feet of water. The raft was finally launched from the cradle and delivered to the tugboat, which was to tow it to Boston. A storm arose, and running short of fuel, the tug cut the raft loose, well out at sea, and returned to port. It was thought that the raft could easily be picked up again, but when the tug returned, it cruised around for several days without finding a trace of this tow, and finally gave it up as

lost. Many months later, this raft was reported stranded and partly broken up on the coast of Norway. The piling was found to be ruined by teredo (shipworms).

Captain Robertson then tried to interest someone in the financing and building of the rafts on the Pacific Coast and succeeded in getting one built in Coos Bay, Oregon, in 1891 and 1892. This raft consisted of piling for delivery in San Francisco, California. Two rafts were built, both of which were lost. Captain Robertson attributed the loss to the tugboat company and accused them of willfully losing the rafts on the theory that this new and cheaper means of transporting piling and lumber would eventually displace the transportation of these commodities by vessels.

After this venture, Captain Robertson, with a new partner by the name of Bain, went to the Columbia River and built a cradle in Astoria, Oregon, in August 1894, which was launched and towed up into Coal Creek Slough, near Stella, Washington. The raft was thrown together by means of derricks and pile drivers of various kinds. Notwithstanding the hurried construction, the raft did not get to sea until October. The raft ran into a storm almost as soon as it crossed the bar and proved a total loss. Some of the pilings drifted back into the Columbia River.

In 1895 another raft was built at Stella, Washington, and taken down the Columbia River into the Pacific. Part of this raft was lost near the



CIRCA 1930. A LUCKENBACH STEAMSHIP CO. LUMBER STEAMER PASSING A "BENSON CIGAR RAFT" AS THE RAFT HEADS DOWN THE COLUMBIA FROM WALLACE SLOUGH TO THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA. THE RAFT AT 900-PLUS FEET IN LENGTH FAR EXCEEDED THE LENGTH OF THE CARGO SHIP.

Golden Gate, but the balance, about sixty-percent, was safely landed in San Francisco Bay and sold at a good profit.

In 1896, Captain Robertson, together with the Port Blakely Mill Company, built an expensive cradle in West Seattle, Washington, which was copper painted to guard against the ravages of the teredo. One raft was built and successfully landed in San Francisco. A second raft was built the following year, but the building progressed in constant fear that the cradle would fall to pieces because of the action of the borers. This raft reached San Francisco with a small loss of material, but the partnership decided it would be too expensive to build a cradle every two years, so the operations were again moved to the fresh waters of the Columbia River. J. A. Fastabend was given the contract to buy the piling and build the rafts for Captain Robertson and the Port Blakely Mill Company. Under this arrangement, two rafts were built at Stella and one at Westport, Oregon. All were safely landed at San Francisco. The raft built at Westport was the last one built by the above-mentioned company.

Captain Robertson then formed a partnership with A. B. Hammond Lumber Company, which proved successful for a number of years, losing only two rafts during the venture.

In 1906, S. Benson and O. J. Evenson entered the ocean rafting business at Wallace Slough, Oregon, on the Columbia River, engaging

Mr. Fastabend to superintend the construction of a cradle and raft. Mr. Fastabend and Mr. Evenson constructed a simple cradle with an improved center locking device, improved the towing gear and system used by Captain Robertson. The first raft was small compared to the type built for the Benson Lumber Company of San Diego, California. It contained not only piling and saw logs of all lengths and sizes, but several hundred thousand feet of sawn timbers and lumber for a complete sawmill to be erected in San Diego for Benson Lumber Company. O. J. Evenson accompanied the tug towing the raft to watch its action in the sea. The information secured on this trip resulted in several improvements. The first raft arrived in perfect condition, and construction started on the mill as soon as the raft could be opened up. The towing distance from the Columbia River to San Diego is about 1,100 miles. The arrival of the raft in San Diego caused considerable comment. Some thought the adventure was merely another real estate boom, and many held that opinion after the rafts continued to arrive year after year. The mill at San Diego has been cutting from three to five rafts each year ever since, each containing from four to five million feet of timber.

One hundred and ten rafts have been landed safely at San Diego Harbor, only three meeting with misfortune. Two were disabled in 1918, which were towed into Santa

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



CIRCA 1925. THE BENSON TIMBER COMPANY RAFT BUILDING FACILITY AT WALLACE SLOUGH, OREGON. THE CONSTRUCTION OF RAFTS AT THIS SITE COMMENCED IN 1906 AND 110 RAFTS WERE ASSEMBLED HERE. IN 1935, DUE TO THE DEPLETION OF OLD GROWTH 100-200 FOOT DOUGLAS FIRS IN PROXIMITY TO WALLACE SLOUGH, THE CRADLE AND ASSEMBLY OPERATIONS WERE MOVED TO A SITE JUST DOWNRIVER FROM CATHLAMET, WASHINGTON, WHERE LOGS WERE THEN SOURCED FROM LOGGING OPERATIONS NEAR DEEP RIVER, WASHINGTON. RAFTS #111-#121 WERE CONSTRUCTED AT THE CATHLAMET SITE.

Cruz, California, where the logs were manufactured by the San Vincente Lumber Company, then operating at this point. Raft 110 broke in two at sea, and both parts were towed into Fort Bragg, California, and the logs were manufactured by the Mendocino Lumber Company for the Benson Lumber Company. The lumber was then shipped by steamer to San Diego.

Over fifty percent of these rafts carried deck loads. Cedar poles, spars, shingles, lath, and logs have been successfully carried as deck loads and delivered in good order. The towing time is now about eighteen days from bar to bar. For safety, the rafts are equipped with two range lights that burn for twenty-one days without attention from the tug crew.

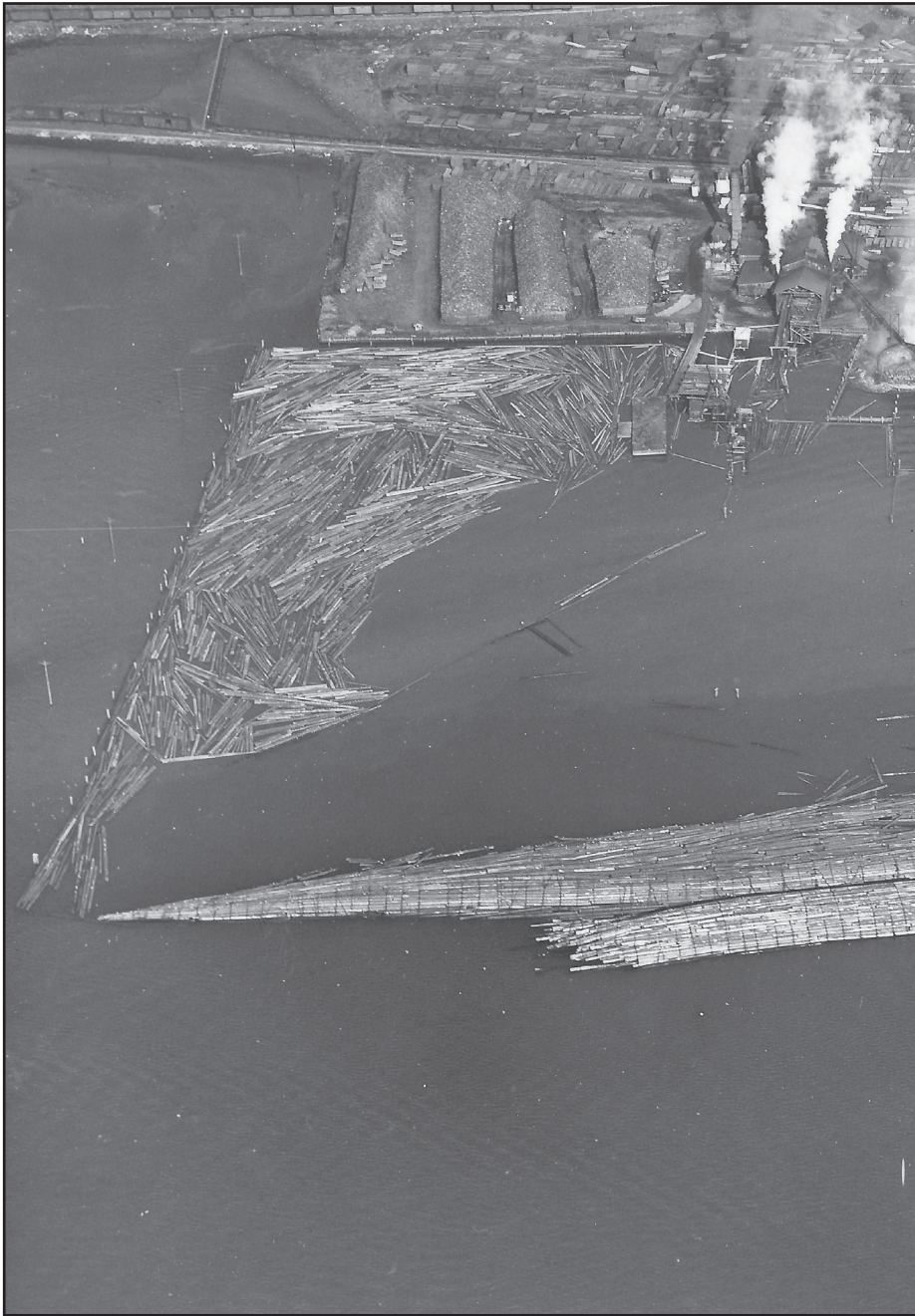
The Benson raft, which is cigar-shaped, is built in a floating cradle or form, which is constructed in sections so that upon completion of the raft, the section can be removed from one side of the raft. The raft is then pulled out of the other half of the cradle, which is moored to piling. When the completed raft is launched, the sections are towed back into place, and the center locks are set, and the cradle is ready for the construction of the next raft. On the side of the cradle, which is moored to the piling, a derrick moves back and forth on a running line as random logs and piling are placed through the raft, course upon course over the length of the cradle. All sizes and lengths of logs are used, but the strength of the

raft depends upon a large portion of tree-length material. The long logs give the necessary lap and backbone, which resists the action in the water as the logs are loaded. When half of the raft is completed, a 2½ inch stud-link anchor chain is run through the center of the raft from end to end, forming the backbone, and after another course of logs is laid, a second center chain is placed to give added safety and strength to the raft. Herringbone chains are shackled to the center chain and attached to the five circle chains at each end of the raft, and 180 feet of tow chain is attached to the middle of the third circle chain from each end of the raft. The third circle chain is the same size as the tow chain. This gives an emergency tow chain that can be used if the tow chain in service becomes unshackled or fails for any cause. The raft will tow equally well from either end. When a pull is exerted on the tow chain, the weight of the 180 feet of chain acts as an equalizer in addition to the towing engine of the tug, and the pull of the tug is transmitted through the tow chain to the circle chains on the opposite end of the raft through the herringbone chains. Any slack created is taken up by the working of the raft in the sea, which always tends to make it longer. After the tow chain is in place, the process of piling in the logs continues until a depth of from twenty-six to twenty-eight feet in the water is reached. Then the circle chains are fastened around the raft and cinched up with the aid of a donkey

IMAGE COURTESY OF JIM AALBERG



MAY 2020. SIMON BENSON'S QUEEN-ANNE STYLE HOME BUILT IN 1900. THE HOUSE HAS BEEN RESTORED AND NOW SITS ON THE PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN DOWNTOWN PORTLAND.



1940. BENSON LUMBER COMPANY, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA. TWO "BENSON CIGAR RAFTS" THAT WERE MOVED TO THE MILL POND. TO THE RIGHT



WERE ASSEMBLED IN THE CRADLE AT CATHLAMET, WASHINGTON ARE BEING BROKEN UP AND THE
IN THE PHOTO IS THE SAWMILL'S 450-FOOT PIER

engine and a set of six sheave blocks and grab shackles. The circle chains are of 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ inch stud-link anchor chain and are placed at twelve-foot intervals. The raft dimensions are width fifty-five feet; maximum depth, thirty-five feet; length 960 feet; draught twenty-six to twenty-eight feet.

The great point in favor of the Benson type of raft is that it is self-tightening, and there is no tendency for the mass to loosen. As soon as the raft is out of the cradle, it tends to flatten and tighten the circle chains, and when it is towed, the process of tightening continues.

DESCRIPTION AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE BENSON OCEAN RAFT

There is no record of how long Captain Robertson's first raft was, but it contained one hundred and ten thousand lineal feet of piling, which can be compared with the first "Benson Type" raft that contained several hundred thousand feet of logs, sawn timbers, lumber, and piling, and was approximately 600 feet long. This great difference in size is made small when the 1941 and 1942 Benson rafts are compared with the first 1906 Benson raft. The difference is from hundreds of thousands of feet of logs to millions of feet, and from 600 feet long to 1,000 feet long. The last Benson rafts contained logs that scaled from four to five million feet of lumber. For the average person, this amount of lumber is hard to visualize; however,

it would build more than one thousand five hundred average-size houses.

The rafts built by the Benson Lumber Company were made up of sawmill logs of all lengths and sizes. The completed raft was cigar-shaped and was held together by a system of chains that weighed a total of 270 tons. There was a distance of 960 feet from the last circle chain on the one end to the last circle chain on the other end; however, the total length was over 1,000 feet since the logs extended well beyond the last chain. The last rafts were fifty-five feet wide, sixteen to seventeen feet high above the water, and drew twenty-six to twenty-eight feet of water. Most of them carried a deck load of logs that was about 700 feet long.

The rafts were built in a large cradle that held the logs together until the raft was completed. When empty, the cradle floated high in the water and looked like the bare ribs of a large ship. It was made in sections with the inside sections secured to piling and the outside sections free so that they could be pulled out. During the building of the raft, the cradle sections were held together in the center by an interlocking device. The bottom parts of the cradle were called tongues and were the interlocking pieces. As a raft was built, the cradle sank into the water until the tops of the sections were just below the surface.

A derrick was the only machine used to build the rafts. The derrick proper was built on a specially con-

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



1935. THREE RAFTS, TWO WITH DECK LOADS, AWAITING POSITIONING AND DISMANTLING IN THE MILL POND OF THE BENSON LUMBER COMPANY SAWMILL ON SAN DIEGO BAY. NOTE THE DECK LOAD ON THE TOP OF THE RAFT. DECK LOADS WERE TYPICALLY COMPRISED OF CEDAR POLES, SPARS, SINGLES, LATH, SAWN LUMBER, AND LOGS. MANY OF THE RAFTS CARRIED SUCH DECK LOADS.

structed wooden barge, which was forty-eight feet wide, 100 feet long, and nine feet deep. The "A" frame was seventy-two feet high, and from it, the boom was suspended. This "A" frame held the blocks through which the cables for lifting the logs and moving the boom were run. The boom was 160 feet long, having a diameter of nineteen inches at the top and about thirty inches at the butt. It could be swung from one side to the other but could not be raised or lowered. Approximately twenty tons could be lifted from the end of the boom by the cables and steam lifting engine. The early derricks had a wood-fired boiler, but the last one was oil-fired.

The derrick was moved back and forth along the side of the raft by means of a running line and small reversing "donkey" engine. The running line or cable was wrapped several times around the drum of the donkey engine, and the ends were tightly secured to large dolphins a short distance beyond the extreme ends of the cradle. In effect, the derrick moved or pulled itself by simultaneously pulling in and letting out cable.

The actual building of the rafts did not take very long, a total of forty-two working days being required. As soon as one raft was completed and launched, the crew of eight to ten put the cradle sections back in place and were ready to start another raft. The first layer of logs was placed by lifting them out of the river with the derrick and lowering them into position in the

cradle. Logs of all sizes and lengths were used; however, the strength of the rafts to resist the actions of the sea depended upon there being a large proportion of tree-length material; in other words, very long logs. The logs were not loaded into the cradle in just any haphazard manner but were carefully selected and placed.

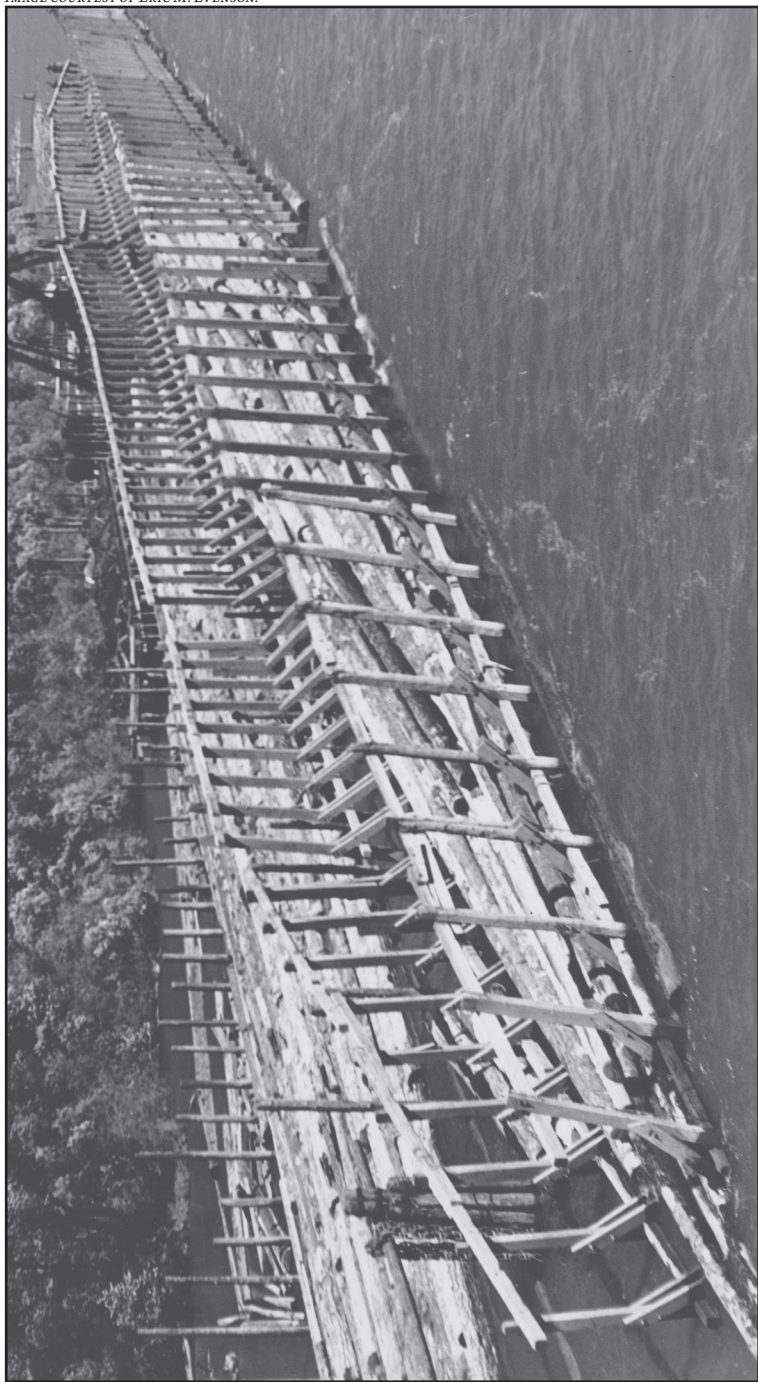
When the raft was half completed, a 2 ½ inch stud-link anchor chain was laid down the center from end to end of the raft. After a layer of logs was placed over this chain, a second center chain was laid to give added strength and safety to the raft. "Herringbone" chains were shackled to the second center chain and attached to five circle chains at each end of the raft. These chains made up the backbone of the rafts.

At the same time the second center chain was put in place, two 180-foot tow chains were attached to the middle of the fourth circle chains from each end of the raft. The fourth circle chains were the same size as the tow chain, and two tow chains were placed so that either end could be used for towing or in the event that one chain was dropped or failed for any reason, there would be an emergency tow chain. The weight of the 180 feet of tow chain acted as an equalizer between the tug and the raft when at sea. The pull of the tug on the tow chain was transmitted to the circle chains on the far end of the raft through the center chain and its herringbone chains.



APRIL 5, 1940. DERRICK LOWERING LOGS INTO THE CRADLE, AS MEN WORKED TO CONSTRUCT THE MASSIVE RAFT, WHICH WOULD TAKE UP TO 45 DAYS TO COMPLETE. CATHLAMET, WASHINGTON.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



1940. RAFT ASSEMBLY CRADLE NEAR CATHLAMET, WASHINGTON.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



MARCH 21, 1940. RAFT READY TO GO AFTER BEING RELEASED FROM THE CRADLE NEAR CATHLAMET, WASHINGTON. THE OUTSIDE CRADLE SECTION HAS BEEN TOWED AWAY. STARTING IN THE MID-1930S, POWERFUL RIVER TUGS REPLACED STERNWHEELERS IN MOVING THESE RAFTS DOWNRIVER.

After the tow chains had been placed, the piling of logs into the cradle continued until a depth of twenty-six to twenty-eight feet in the water was reached. Next, the circle chains were fastened around the raft and tightened up with the aid of the derrick and the use of a set of six sheave blocks and grab shackles. The circle chains were 17/8-inch stud-link anchor chain and were placed at twelve-foot intervals.

Unless a deck load was put on, the raft was complete at this point, but if a deck load was put on, then more logs were piled on top of the raft and chained in place.

OREGON LOGS HELPED SAVE SAN DIEGO—TWICE!

The first raft, which arrived in San Diego Bay on September 7, 1906, was composed primarily of piling timbers that were to be used in the construction of the docks for the new sawmill. However, they did not serve the purpose intended—these logs were used to hold back floodwaters. When the Colorado River burst through its levees in August of 1906, the gush of water threatened to inundate the Imperial Valley of inland Southern California. Having just relocated from the Pacific Northwest to San Diego to oversee construction of the new sawmill, O.J. Evenson cooperated with the Southern Pacific Railway to rush logs just recently arrived in the bay on the first Benson Log Raft to the breach

at the levees where the logs were driven in long rows to retain the rocks and remaining fill. Using these 150-foot logs greatly reduced the flood damage, which never made it to the coast.

Logs from the next raft would be used to commence the construction of the new sawmill.

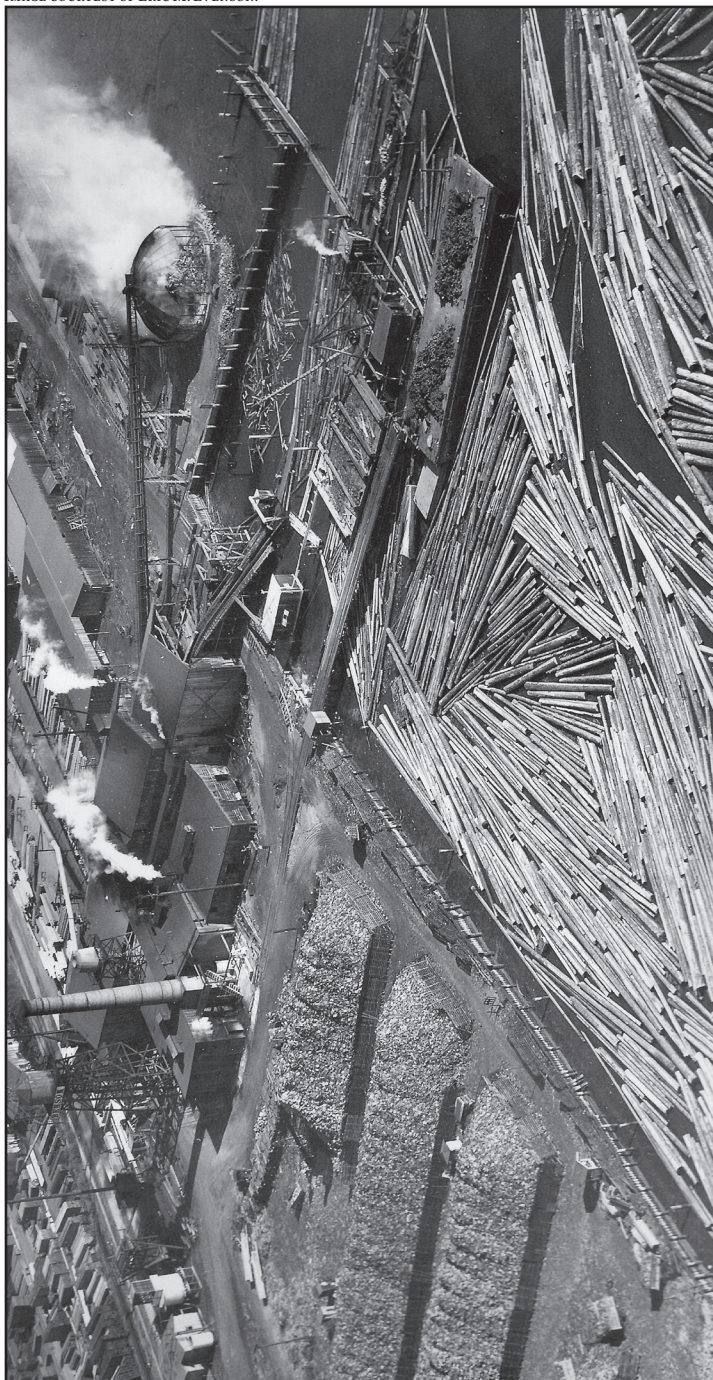
Ten years later, in January of 1916, during another major flood event, miles of the Santa Fe railroad tracks and bridges were swept away, and San Diego was accordingly isolated. Logs from the Benson Rafts were made available to the railroad by Frank Lynch, and the lines were quickly repaired and reopened.

97.3% SUCCESS RATE

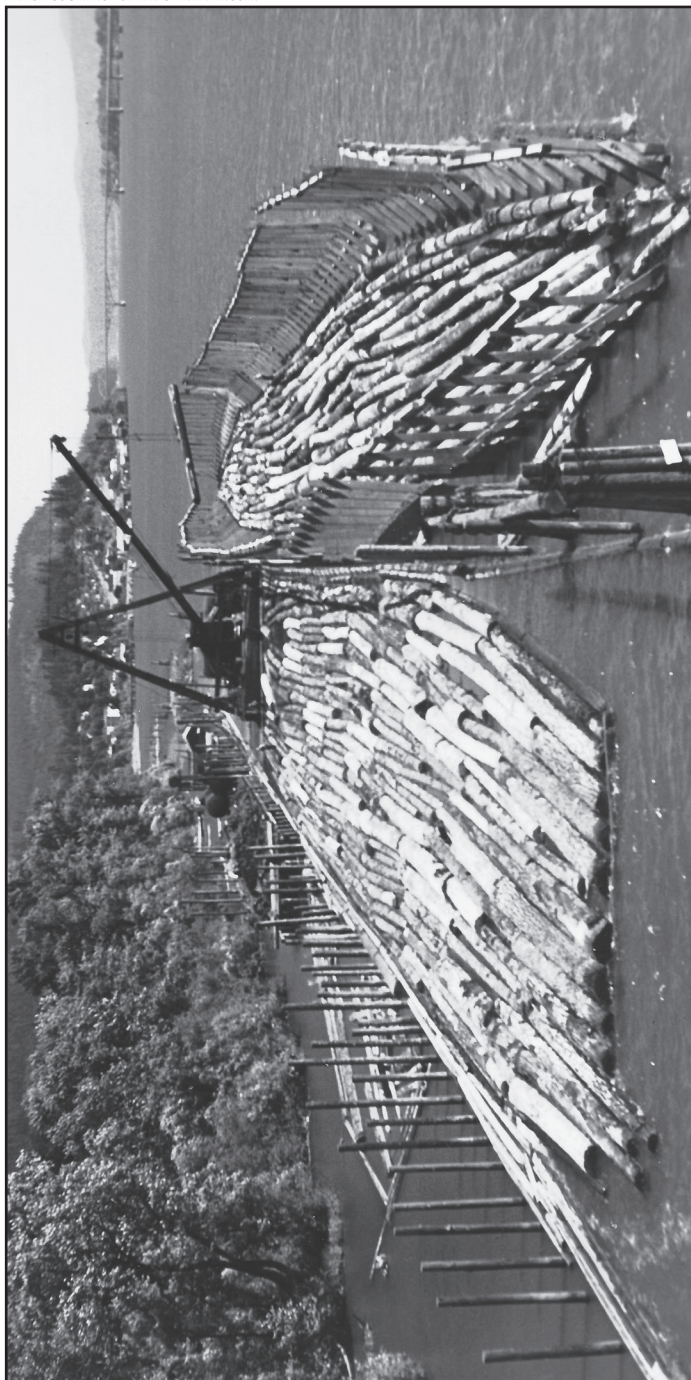
Over the 1,150-mile trek, only four of the 120 Benson Cigar Rafts experienced problems during the thirty-five-year run. Two were disabled in 1918 and had to be towed into Santa Cruz, California, where the logs were processed into lumber by the San Vicente Lumber Company. In 1938, Raft #110 broke its tow at sea, and both parts of the raft were dragged into Fort Bragg, California. The Mendocino Lumber Company manufactured the logs for the Benson Lumber Company. The lumber was then shipped by steamer to San Diego.

In July of 1937, the ocean-going tug *Sunshine* broke a crankshaft and became crippled off the southern Oregon coast while towing one of

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



1940. THE MASSIVE MILL POND OF THE BENSON LUMBER COMPANY FULL OF LOGS FROM THE DISASSEMBLED LOG RAFTS. MOUNTAINS OF SLAB WOOD ARE VISIBLE ON THE DOCK. THIS MILL BY-PRODUCT USED FOR FIREWOOD WAS A HUGE PROFIT CENTER FOR THE MILL. TO THE RIGHT THE REMAINING MILL WASTE IS BEING BURNED.



APRIL 1940. CONSTRUCTION OF THE VERY LAST RAFT. IT WOULD TYPICALLY TAKE 40 DAYS TO COMPLETE A RAFT. RAFTS #111-#120 WERE ASSEMBLED AT THIS SITE ON THE NORTH SHORE OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER, WEST OF CATHLAMET, WASHINGTON. IN THE BACKGROUND, UPRIVER, YOU CAN SEE THE JULIA BUTLER HANSEN BRIDGE CONNECTING CATHLAMET TO PUGET ISLAND, WHICH OPENED EIGHT MONTHS PRIOR TO THIS PHOTOGRAPH, IN AUGUST OF 1939.

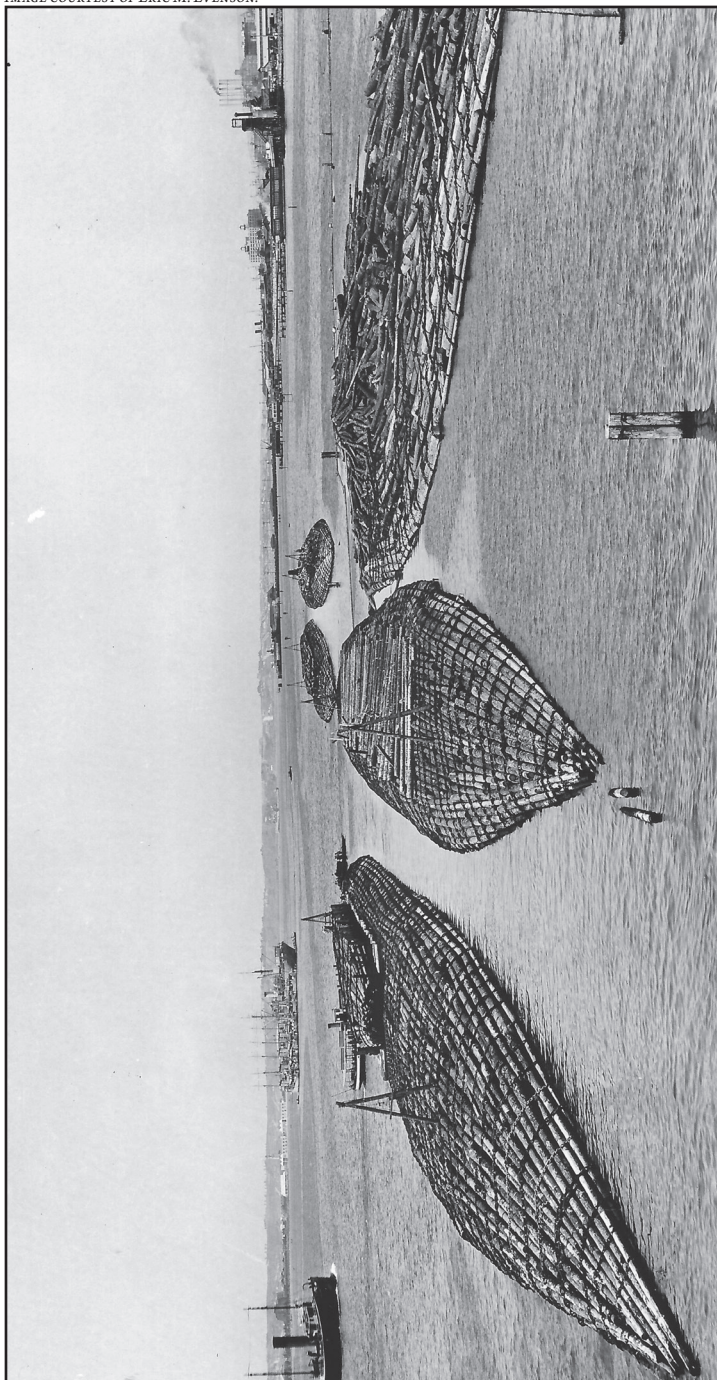


CIRCA 1930. RAFT COMING AROUND POINT LOMA INTO SAN DIEGO BAY BEING TOWED BY A RED STACK 1,000+ HP OCEAN-GOING TUG OF THE CROWLEY FLEET OF SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA. SIXTY NAUTICAL MILES A DAY WAS CONSIDERED A GOOD RUN FOR THE TUG. NOTE THE "CIGAR-SHAPE" AND THE EXTENSION OF THE LOGS PAST THE LAST "CIRCLE CHAIN" ON BOTH ENDS OF THE RAFT.



Circa 1925. Two sternwheelers carefully push the 1,000-foot raft down river to the mouth of the Columbia where an ocean-going tug would attach its tow line for the 1,450-mile sea voyage to San Diego. Note the kerosene lantern hung from the center of the A-frame structure. (These lanterns were placed on both ends of the raft). The lanterns would burn continuously, day and night. The kerosene was later replaced with acetylene ones and eventually by storage battery lights.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



CIRCA 1910. FOUR LOG RAFTS, WITH DECK LOADS, AWAITING DISASSEMBLY AND ONE RAFT PARTIALLY DISASSEMBLED.
THE BENSON LUMBER CO. SAWMILL ON RIGHT.

the Benson Timber Company's 1,000-foot-long rafts. Floating atop the raft was 5,000,000 feet of timber valued at \$104,000 (nearly \$2 million by today's inflation). It was left to the swells, perished, and then entered the ocean. Then entered the tug *Sea Ranger*, which raced from San Francisco to attach its tow lines and claim the logs as a salvage prize. Willard Evenson would not have that. He ordered the 700-horsepower tug *Arthur Foss* to chase down the *Sea Ranger* and reclaim the jacked log raft. The controversy was ultimately settled to each party's satisfaction, including the insurer of the raft, Lloyd's of London.

Also, in 1937, one of the Benson Cigar Rafts broke its tow line after having been grounded. The raft then careened on a flood tide in San Diego Bay, threatening damage to the *USS Flusser*, a destroyer moored in the harbor. The *Flusser* hastily slipped its moorings and backed away. The raft also menaced the big destroyer tender, the *USS Whitney*.

THE LAST RAFT

In August of 1941, Raft #120 caught fire off the coast of Monterey, California. The mystery of how a raft of wet logs could be destroyed at sea by fire was never solved. The raft burned for two days before it broke apart scattering loose logs into the Pacific, causing a navigational hazard off the coast from San Francisco.

Frank C. Lynch, then-current president of the Benson Lumber Co., suggested wartime sabotage as the United States entered WWII. He turned the wreckage over to the insurer Lloyd's of London, then fuming at the rising insurance premiums, decided to terminate the rafting of logs to the mill in San Diego. Of course, other issues than just the insurance costs had come into play in the early '40s, most importantly the supply of appropriate logs for the construction of these rafts.

Frank C. Lynch was the nephew of William Frank Lynch, the owner of the Benson Lumber Co., from 1909 until his death in 1939. The nephew had taken over the management of the operations in early 1938 due to his uncle's failing health.

Until 1942, the Benson Lumber Company's sawmill at the foot of Sigsbee Street in San Diego operated at full capacity. For the next four years, the mill operated only on a limited basis and permanently closed in 1946. On May 25, 1957, the last principal remaining structure, the 80-foot boiler chimney stack, was toppled by a planned implosion, and construction of the 10th Avenue Pier commenced. Today, the site is occupied by the San Diego Convention Center.

These massive ocean-going rafts were designed and engineered for old-growth trees measuring 100 to 200-feet in length. These trees,

IMAGE COURTESY OF ERIC M. EVENSON.



SEPTEMBER 7, 1906. THE RED STACK CROWLEY FLEET OF OCEAN-GOING TUGS TOWING THE FIRST OF 120 LOG RAFTS INTO SAN DIEGO BAY. DUE TO THE DRAFT OF THIS GIANT LOG RAFT, IT SEVERED THE SUBMARINE TELEPHONE CABLE BETWEEN CORONADO ISLAND AND SAN DIEGO. MOST OF THE TOWN OF SAN DIEGO TURNED OUT TO GREET THE BEHEMOTH CIGAR-SHAPED CRAFT FROM THE COLUMBIA RIVER.

while still available in limited areas, were becoming difficult to get out of the forest. Truck logging was beginning to replace logging railroad operations in the late 1930s. The trucks, and the newly constructed narrow logging roads could meet the elevated grades required to reach the pockets of old-growth timber. However, they could only accommodate the hauling out of logs forty to fifty-five feet in length—simply too short to meet the engineering requirements of the Benson log raft.

It was also becoming more economical to ship finished lumber products. Natural gas and electricity had replaced wood for heating and cooking, taking away additional profits in supply slab wood from the mill. World War II made towing these 1,000-foot-long log rafts down the Pacific Coastline impossible. When the stockpile of remaining logs at the mill diminished, the mill shut down. There was an attempt at the boat building business to modify tuna clippers for use as the Navy coastal patrol vessels, but it was not a financial success and accordingly short-lived.

The Benson Timber operations in Clatskanie were winding down as well in the late 1930s. The company had logged over a billion feet of

timber since its inception in 1911, with a significant portion of the timber going into the building of the giant log rafts. On May 31, 1937, the company declared a dividend payable in land. The primary recipients were members of the Evenson family, R.L. and L.B. Hanna, and members of the Lynch family. In the early 1940s, the Lynch family commenced the liquidation of their remaining timberland. Much of the acreage was now logged-over stump-land. Longview Fibre acquired significant portions. A substantial amount of acreage held by the Lynch and Hanna families was quit-claimed over to members of the Evenson family as they agreed to make all payment of back property taxes on the timberland. And at that, the impossible era of the Simon Benson Cigar Rafts was finally at an end.

If readers are interested in pursuing this topic further, all the author's research documents, sources, photographs, and actual film footage of these giant logs moving down the Columbia are available in the Liisa Penner Archives and Research Center located at our Heritage Museum in Astoria. You may also email the author directly at jamesaalberg@gmail.com. 🍷

UNIONTOWN

By Roy Schulbach

THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH brought the first Finns to California. Many caught the gold fever, jumped ship, and headed for the gold mines. Most of the gold-seekers met only with hardship and disappointment. Many of the disillusioned Finns drifted northwest into work, such as logging, fishing, and farming. By 1860 a small group of Finns had settled in the Coos Bay area. By 1870, the first Finns had settled in Astoria. But the first Finns in California were not the first Finns on the Pacific coast. The Russian-American Fur Company hired Finns as hunters, traders, and craftsmen. The Sitka colony had established Fort Ross just sixty-five miles north of San Francisco. It is possible Finns may have been members of expeditions to this area. In 1839, Admiral Arvid Adolph Etholen was appointed Gov. General of Alaska. He brought Finnish artisans and craftsmen to build a Russian church and also a Lutheran church in Sitka. The Russian era came to a close in 1867. Many Finns stayed in Alaska, but some drifted south to Vancouver, Seattle, and other places.

Significant immigration to America followed in the 1860s and into the 1920s. The principal exodus was around 1880 from Sweden and Norway, mostly from Oulu and Vaasa provinces in northern Finland. Many came to the western states. Many were miners, and some went into logging. Fishing was a natural and familiar activity, as was farming. Longshoring and construction employed many Finns. After 1850, the early Finns were fishing along the Pacific coast north of San Francisco, ranging farther north with each season. By 1870, some had settled in Astoria, where fish canning was becoming an important industry. In 1873 there were eight canneries in Astoria, and the number grew to thirty-nine by 1883. Finns came to Astoria to fish, and most of them did just that. The Finns did not settle among the native-born Americans but concentrated in Uppertown east of Astoria proper where they lived among a large Scandinavian population or to the west of the town in what came to be called Uniontown. By 1900 Uniontown was almost entirely Finnish. Astoria's Uniontown

continued to grow and develop for fifty years before I was born. Finnish owned businesses were established, social and cultural organizations were formed, including churches and the Finnish Brotherhood, and Finnish language newspapers were published. Finnish doctors, dentists, and lawyers provided professional services.

When I was a young student in grade school, a fellow student posed a riddle. "Why is the Columbia River like a salmon?" The answer – Because each has Finns on both sides.

The Lower Columbia region on both sides was indeed populated by a large number of Finnish people as well as Scandinavians: Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes. People of many other nationalities such as Dutch, German, Greek, Estonians, Chinese, and Japanese also lived in the area. Most had come to this country to escape poverty, persecution, or forced military service. They sought more satisfying lives, to gain land and build their own homes, and to live in peaceful circumstances.

My parents fit these formulas to one degree or another. My mother was the eldest child in a large and impoverished family in Bothnian Finland. At the age of nineteen, in 1909, she immigrated to the United States with just a ticket and no money to prove that she could support herself after being admitted to the U.S. She overcame

this dilemma by borrowing from a fellow passenger enough to satisfy the immigration authorities. After being admitted, she immediately repaid the loan and found a job as a maid in a household. My father, on the other hand, belonged to a relatively well-off family in Narva, Estonia. He had been impressed into the Russian army, right off the city streets. On receiving a furlough to visit his home, he told his family he wasn't going back to the Czar's army. He instead was going to America. The family's reaction was, "Not so fast. Wait for us, and we'll all go together." After gathering some necessary possessions and all the available money, they traveled to Finland, where they obtained papers by bribing the people issuing passports. Everything else they left behind.

Both my parents eventually arrived in Astoria, where they were married.

My father's parents settled on a farm in the Lewis & Clark valley near Astoria, where my grandfather farmed.

My parents at first lived in the heart of Uniontown, that section of Astoria where the Columbia River bridge curves over the business district. Later we moved to a home that my parents built on Alameda Avenue, one of Uniontown's main streets. Two of my earliest memories of Uniontown concern events that I was told I couldn't have

remembered because I was too young. Nevertheless, these strong images are present in my memory even today. The first of these is that of an alley near Hellberg's Drug Store. I remember seeing the water lapping at the pilings through the spaces between planks, which paved the alley. The other was my mother pushing me in a baby carriage to the new home my parents were building. I still can see the image of my father shingling the roof from my baby carriage vantage point.

All of Uniontown was built on pilings in the early days. The plank streets were built on pilings. The railroads, canneries, and net racks were on pilings. Later, the area was filled in by the Port of Astoria pipeline dredge. The streets were paved, and residents didn't have to worry about falling into the river from the sidewalks.

Uniontown had grown up some fifty years before I was born. It had probably reached a population peak by 1910, after which growth came to a standstill.

Union Fish Cannery was probably the largest employer, although the Columbia River Packers Association probably surpassed it in later years. Other canneries in Uniontown were the Sanborn and Barby Packing Companies.

There were mooring places near the canneries. Boats were fastened at each end with ropes that ran over wooden blocks. This arrange-

ment kept the boats lined up and away from each other, allowing them to rise and fall with the tides. Whenever the river was rough or choppy, particularly in the summer when the blocks were dry, they protested with eerie musical noises—hundreds of blocks combined into a melodious orchestra of sounds which could be heard all over Uniontown. Children were put to bed listening to this music.

Taylor Street businesses that I remember include the Finnish Mercantile Company, Pentilla's Dry Goods Store, Puusti's Hardware, Hellberg's Drug Store, and Pietarilla's Grocery. There was a pool hall, barbershop, and the Youngs Bay Cooperative Dairy—the center of an unsolved explosion that caused a lot of excitement. All of these businesses had Finnish speaking clerks. Thompsons' Monument Works made tombstones out of Finnish granite, and many a Uniontown Finn lies under one of these pieces of Finland.

Net repairs took place on net racks adjacent to the canneries, and boat repairs were carried out in building lofts into which boats were raised on hand-powered boat elevators. An interesting sidelight was that some Chinese children listening to fishermen repairing their nets gained the ability to speak Finnish.

Fish boats were built at Columbia Boat Works, plus several other

Finnish-owned boatyards. During World War I, large wooden ships were built by Wilson Ship Yards, another Finnish-owned concern. Such large ships were no longer needed when the war ended, and the yards fell into decay.

In addition to the regular retail businesses in Uniontown, there were several boarding houses and at least three commercial saunas. One of those was Union Steam Baths, owned and operated by Kaarlo Koskela and his wife. Mr. Koskela was known to all for being an Olympic Wrestling Champion in the 1912 Olympics held in Stockholm, Sweden.

Much history of Uniontown has been told in publications of the Finnish American Historical Society of the West. One, *Boarding House Finns*, tells of the early boarding houses and the place they filled in Finnish communities throughout the west. Other publications cover the churches in early Uniontown, activities of Finnish Halls, and the logging industry.

Taylor School was situated on the hillside above Hellbergs. It was in its last days when I entered first grade. I attended for two years, after which I moved to the newly built Captain Robert Gray school. At these schools, each recess or after lunch period, we would line up outside the school and march inside to a record of one of several John Phillip Sousa marches. Several children

entering first grade the year I did were unable to speak English. They received no special classes or attention, yet all were speaking English within a month or two. As for me, I can't even remember the process of learning English or Finnish. I remember we spoke English when we played with other children outdoors, and I always switched to Finnish on entering our home. My mother, like many Finnish women, spoke no English.

Uniontown wasn't "big town," USA. From its center to each end, it was probably less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. The Columbia River bordered it on one side, and the alder-covered hill closed in on the other. Taylor Street and Alameda Street ran its length but on different levels. West Bond led to downtown Astoria over what was called the Bond Street Hill. There were several other streets of shorter length; this was the world in which we lived.

Most of the boys had a tremendous amount of freedom to roam this area and to fill their days with adventure, especially in the summer. We pretty much stayed in our region unless a circus came into town. Then we went to the circus grounds in an area once known as Scow Bay. We watched the circus train unloading. We tried to get free passes by working. On one occasion, my brother and I were promised passes if we would carry water to the lemonade concession.

A very thirsty horse just off the train intercepted my brother, who was carrying a full pail of water. Before he could get free, the horse drank half the water. The rest, however, became lemonade. We didn't get our promised passes, but we did sneak into the tent.

We explored all of Uniontown: the boat moorages, the docks, the shops of Columbia Iron Works, where we watched men working with large metalworking lathes and transferring power from a large central jackshaft to the drill presses and other machines. We watched can manufacturing at Union Fish Cannery and collected the narrow strips of metal discarded in the processes from which we wove baskets. We entered the cannery floor during the fishing season when the floor was covered with thousands of salmon ready for butchering by the Chinese who worked in the canneries. We would watch Finnish women hand-packing cans. The salting of salmon into large barrels left the backbones, heads, and tails available to anyone. We often filled a lard bucket with chopped up pieces to take home to be turned into *kalamojakka* (KAH-la-moy-a-kah), a fish stew made with potatoes, onion, and milk.

Fishing was carried out by Scandinavians fishing from gillnet boats. Some fish were caught at the seining grounds. Other fishermen trolled in the ocean. A frequent

sight in Uniontown was the straddle trucks that transported canned salmon to the warehouses on Pier 3. The low-bedded, solid-tired, chain-driven trucks of Seaborg Transfer Company also made many trips down Taylor Street with canned salmon. There were more than a few cans that were quality tested by neighborhood boys. I knew of some who carried a can opener just for that purpose.

Some of you may have seen a film on public television called "Remembering Uniontown." The part about small boys rowing about between the port dock slips in salmon boxes, which were about four feet long, possibly eighteen inches wide and a foot deep is all true. I was one of those involved. Among other things not reported on or even recommended was launching steam or calcium carbide rockets, at least, not for eight-year-olds. I won't go into the technical details of this early day rocketry.

The influence of World War I films still prevailed in the mid-twenties. Some of the teenagers dug trenches in a clearing above Uniontown. I thought it was a good idea, but it didn't last long after the parents found out about it. The artillery consisted of super slingshots capable of launching four-inch boulders.

Everything wasn't dangerous or fool-hearty. We fished from the piers. We also fished for crawfish where the large mooring basin is

today. We wore rubber boots to wade in the shallow water at low tide using flashlights, calcium carbide lamps, or a coffee-can with a candle to locate the crawfish. We would reach down and grasp them behind their claws. Fishing from Pier 2 for Tom cod was one activity, as was sucker fishing under the plank road next to the Pillsbury flour mill. I remember falling into the water while fishing for suckers. The boy with me ran to the mill and was soon back with some men to save me. In the meantime, I discovered the water was only about two feet deep, and I'd saved myself by the time help arrived.

Of course, the Astoria Regatta was a big thing in the twenties with boat races, logrolling, a carnival, and a fireworks display. The most memorable fireworks occurred in the early thirties. The show was to happen from a barge anchored in the river in front of the Regatta grandstand. Something went wrong. Fireworks went in all directions except up. The fireworks crew jumped overboard, and the show was over before even beginning. I was disappointed.

On occasion, visiting Navy ships came to Astoria. We always went aboard to visit. I still remember the *HMS Dauntless* because several of the crew kept trying to get us to enlist, telling us what a good life we would have in the British Navy. Of course, we thought ourselves a little too young, and they knew we were.

Toys and games which we had were frequently homemade. Boys would roll hoops, guiding them with a stick that had a nail driven into it. We made water guns from bamboo sections. Scooters were made from old roller skates nailed to a two by four and mounted with an orange crate. We played mud hole Mumbly-Peg. We sledded down the stairway that connected Alameda and Taylor streets. We did this even when there was no snow.

The houses in Uniontown lined the land-side of Taylor Street. These houses burned wood for fuel. The wood was dumped at the edge of the street. It then had to be hauled up to the houses on small trams running on wood rails. The cars were pulled up the track by hand-powered winches.

On Alameda Street, the earliest street lights were arc lights which were lowered to the ground about once a week for adjustment or replacement of the carbon electrodes.

Astoria's most famous Tall Firs practiced on a backboard nailed to a pole about 100 feet from my home. I never played with them; eight and nine-year-olds aren't tolerated by teenagers playing basketball. It was played year-round on Alameda. It required little space compared to football or baseball, and automobile traffic was not much to worry about. The Tall Firs was an appellation attached to the University of Oregon basketball team of 1939 that won

the NCAA Championship for the University of Oregon. Coach John Warren's team included several Uniontown boys he had coached earlier in his career at Astoria High School. The best known Uniontown football player was Delbert Bjork, who went on to play professional football.

There were many other sports figures, and for more information on them, read Wally Palmberg's *Toward One Flag: 1865-1943, A History of Lower Columbia Athletics*. The author was an All-American basketball player from Astoria High School, and he also coached there for many years. His co-author, the late Arthur Koski, was also a Uniontown, and he later coached swimming at Oregon State University.

Pocket money is nice to have. Some boys earned money by delivering daily papers on regular routes, and some earned small change by selling Sunday papers. A group of fifteen or twenty boys would gather at Hellberg's Drug Store, where each would get five copies of the *Oregon Journal* and the *Oregonian*. The boys would fan out all over Uniontown calling "*Oregon Journal, Oregonian*." People would pop out of their houses to purchase their papers. In probably thirty minutes, it was all over. The boys would get to keep ten cents from the gross dollar amount.

We also earned money selling junk. Brass, aluminum, copper, and lead scrap were profitable. Selling whiskey flasks and one gallon and half-gallon jugs to the local bootlegger brought in a little change, ten cents for a gallon jug, five cents for a half-gallon. This activity has a different, more important sounding name today, recycling.

Boxcars containing wheat were unloaded at Pillsbury Mills on Pier 1. Boxcars had double walls, and quite often, grain would leak into the inner spaces. Sometimes as much as a hundred pounds might accumulate in a wall section, although it was usually much less. This wheat could be salvaged through a small hole near the floor of each wall section by continually raking it aside. It wasn't profitable for the mill to try to salvage this grain, but this was no problem for us kids. We could sell it to a man who had a small poultry business near Astoria. The barter system worked also. We would cut small alder trees, trim them and drag the trunks to a small smokehouse along Taylor Street. In exchange, we would get a small piece of smoked salmon.

Milk was distributed around Uniontown by several dairies. These included Consumers Cooperative, Lampi's, Raasina's, Larson's, Seppa's, and Henningsen's. "Shagging" was the name given to the delivery process. The Shaggers were generally older teenagers who rode on the

trucks or running boards, hopping off on the run to deliver the bottles and collect the empties.

Chinese gardeners sold fresh vegetables from pushcarts. The calls were in Finnish. *Punajuuri* for table-beets, for example. I remember Sing Lee, who arrived in the area years ago as a young man, leaving a young wife and child in China. He worked hard growing vegetables. He lived frugally, sending money to his family. He hoped to be reunited with them, but it never happened. He died fifteen or twenty years ago at an old age. Everyone remembered him for the kites he would fly for relaxation. I recall seeing a watercolor painting at the State Fair about fifteen years ago. It showed Sing Lee's modest aging quarters with Sing flying a kite over his remaining patch of vegetables, which had by then shrunk to fit his declining strength. Our Fourth of July celebrations wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the Chinese. We bought our fireworks from the Chinese stores.

Some Chinese children spoke Finnish. I remember the story of the County Veterinarian needing a translator to visit a Finnish farmer. He took along a Chinese boy. One Chinese postman spoke Finnish fluently. Another report had a Finnish woman telling the Chinese fish merchant that she would "laiket some RIMP." He at first did not comprehend, but after some sec-

onds, he finally understood. "Ah so, you liky buy SLIMP." Same problem, only different. Both meant SHRIMP.

Saunas weren't just places to get clean. They had a social aspect. They were a meeting place where you could visit while waiting for your turn in one of the private rooms. In the large public spaces, you could catch up on all the news and gossip of the week. Fishing, shipping, logging, and sports were typical subjects. Young people could listen to the talk, but the big treat was the bottle of soda pop, which we drink in the dressings room after finishing the sauna. Friday and Saturday were the big days.

Typically, people arrived at the sauna with clean underclothing wrapped in their towel, or alternately you could rent one. You paid the fee, purchased your pop, and proceeded to either the men's or women's section or waited your turn for one of the small private saunas. A person undressed and entered the washrooms where there were showers and a supply of wooden pails. The bucket would be filled with cold water, which was used to cool one's self if it got too hot. The *loyly* or steam was created by pouring water onto stones, which were heated to a very high temperature. Switches or *vihtas* were usually of cedar twigs or birch and were used to gently stroke one's skin while in the steam room. Afterward,

you washed and showered. In the dressing room, people sat around talking until perspiration stopped, then dressed and left feeling clean and refreshed.

In the years before World War II, no one ever checked in a billfold or other valuables at the desk, and I never heard of any thefts. After the war years, checking-in one's valuables became the norm.

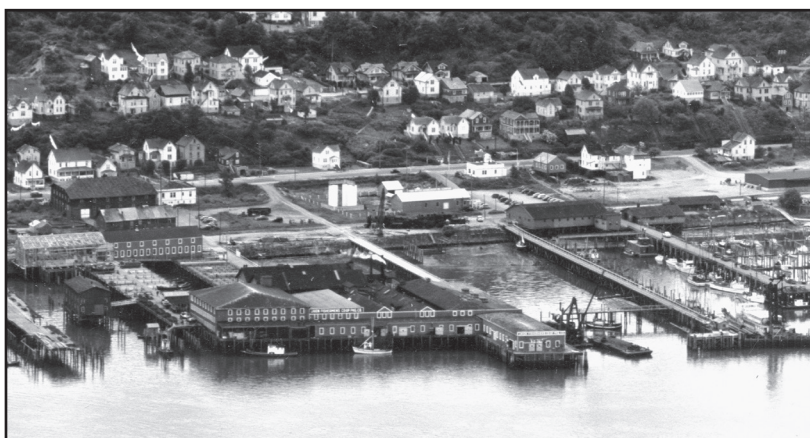
Uniontown had several churches, and at one time, an active temperance society flourished. Even during Prohibition, there was a town drunk, possibly more than one. I remember one in particular, and I also remember the woman who provided him with meals from the kitchen of her boarding house during the last years of his unhappy life.

Yes, we had our heroes and our heroines. We had our losers and our winners, our saints, and our sinners.

Uniontown was predominately Finnish, but other nationalities lived there as well. All of them together created this truly All-American community with a spirit and vitality that few places in America could boast about.

Old Uniontown has aged. It has changed, not necessarily for the better, nor for the worse. It has mellowed. The foreign-born have mostly passed on. The second, third, and fourth generations seldom speak Finnish at home or in the stores. But Uniontown is still there, and traces of Finnish accents are heard in the people's speech. The United Finnish Kaleva Brothers and Sisters lodge (UFKB&S) still serves the people as it has for more than a century.

This was and is Uniontown: where everyone lives on the right side of the tracks. 🍷



WEST ASTORIA, OREGON, KNOWN AS UNIONTOWN. UNION FISHERMEN'S COOPERATIVE PACKING COMPANY IS IN THE FOREGROUND.

CHS IMAGE #



ASTORIA HARBOR DURING THE 1933 ASTORIA REGATTA AS VIEWED FROM THE DECK OF THE USS CONSTITUTION.
A BENSON-STYLE LOG RAFT IS TIED UP AT THE DOCKS.